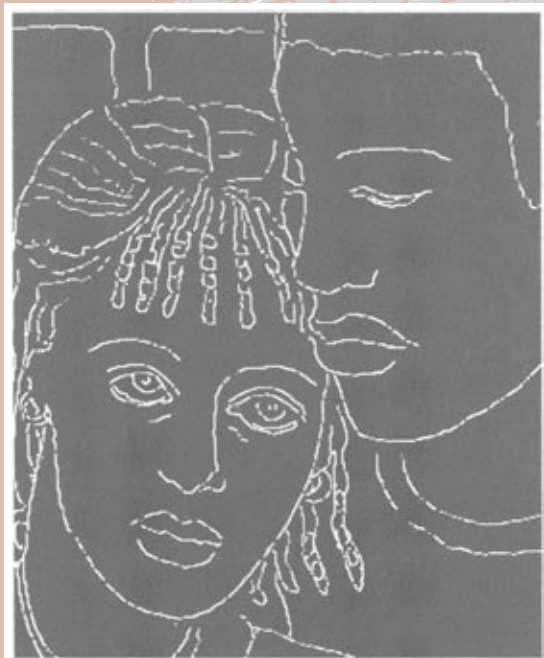




# *When Your Baby Dies...* *A Gentle Guide For* *Teenage Parents*



CALIFORNIA  
**SIDS**  
PROGRAM

SUDDEN INFANT  
DEATH SYNDROME

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH SERVICES MCH

Sudden Infant  
Death Syndrome

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**When your baby dies, this can be the deepest loss you go through in life. Your baby meant so many things to you.**

**The weeks and months ahead may be the hardest time in your life. People go through this pain in their own way and in their own time.**

**Grieving is a very personal thing. But we hope this booklet will help you feel less alone.**

*This booklet is written especially for  
teenage parents who have lost a baby to  
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).*

*Many thanks to the teen parents  
who helped write it.*

**June 1990**

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**Tracey:** When my baby died, things people had told me while I was pregnant echoed in my head. “You’re too young to have a baby... You shouldn’t have been having sex in the first place... You should at least stop smoking.” I was in such pain. I felt so guilty – that somehow it was my fault.

My mom and the public health nurse told me, “SIDS is nobody’s fault. Nobody knows why it happens. You didn’t do anything wrong. Don’t blame yourself. There was nothing you could have done.” They told me over and over, “It isn’t your fault.”

I guess I finally started to believe it when I heard this story at a SIDS support group meeting. There was a woman who was a nurse and she knew CPR. Her baby was asleep in her arms. She saw that the baby just stopped breathing all of a sudden. She started doing CPR right then. But her baby still died. There was nothing she could do to stop it. When I heard that, I began to really believe it wasn’t my fault.



SIDS isn't your fault.

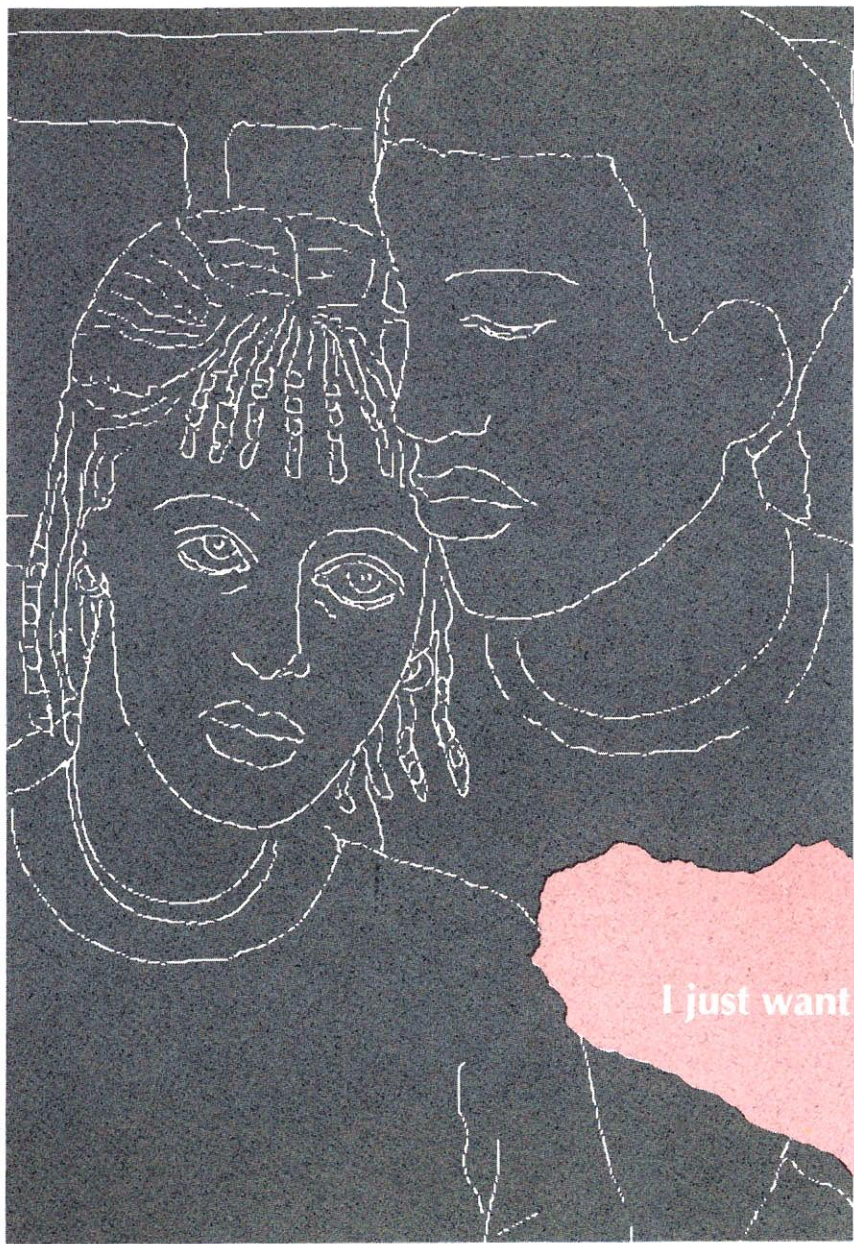
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**Kim:** When our baby died, the first hours and days were a total blur to me. I was in shock. I kept throwing up. I couldn't believe it was really happening. I was in a daze. I couldn't do anything. My mom had to tell me when to take a shower, when to brush my teeth.

**Phil:** I kept thinking, "How could this happen?" There was nothing I could do. The pain is too much, even now. It hurts me so much. Once I bashed my finger with a hammer, just so something else would hurt for awhile.

**Kim:** My arms just ache to hold my baby. For awhile, I'd hear her crying. I didn't know what to do without her. I was used to feeding her, giving her a bath, taking her for a walk. I can still picture rocking her, holding her.

**Phil:** I used to love coming home to see her. She was always so happy to see me. I miss getting up in the morning with her laughing. It's all the little things I miss. I just want her back.



I just want my baby back.

**Maria:** When our baby died, our families tried to help. At first all you can feel is your pain. In a way, nobody can help. But it is good to have someone to talk to, someone to cry with.

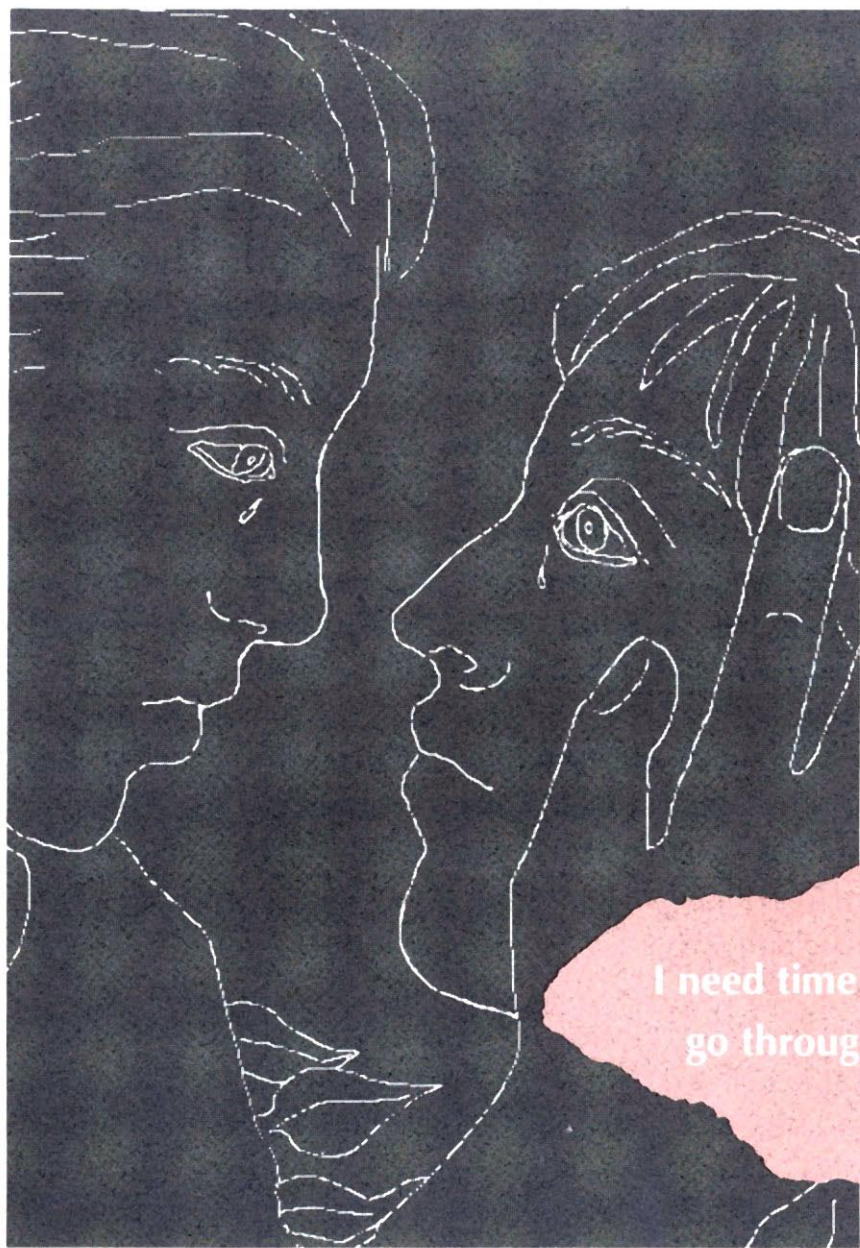
**Alex:** After a while, my parents didn't want to talk about it at all. That made me mad. They want me to just get on with my life. But I need more time to go through the pain.

**Maria:** My mom and dad wanted me to leave Alex and come home and go back to the way it was. They got very protective. But they'd say things like, "Don't cry. You were too young to have a baby anyhow." That just made me feel worse.

**Alex:** Some days I just don't want to deal with it anymore. I want to go out dancing and forget about it. I wish my life could be normal again.

**Maria:** I think about my friends still in school going to dances, having fun. I gave up all that and I can't have it back. Now I don't have anything.

**Alex:** Sometimes I feel guilty if I don't think about him all the time. But I know I'll never forget him. I'll always love him.



I need time to  
go through the pain.

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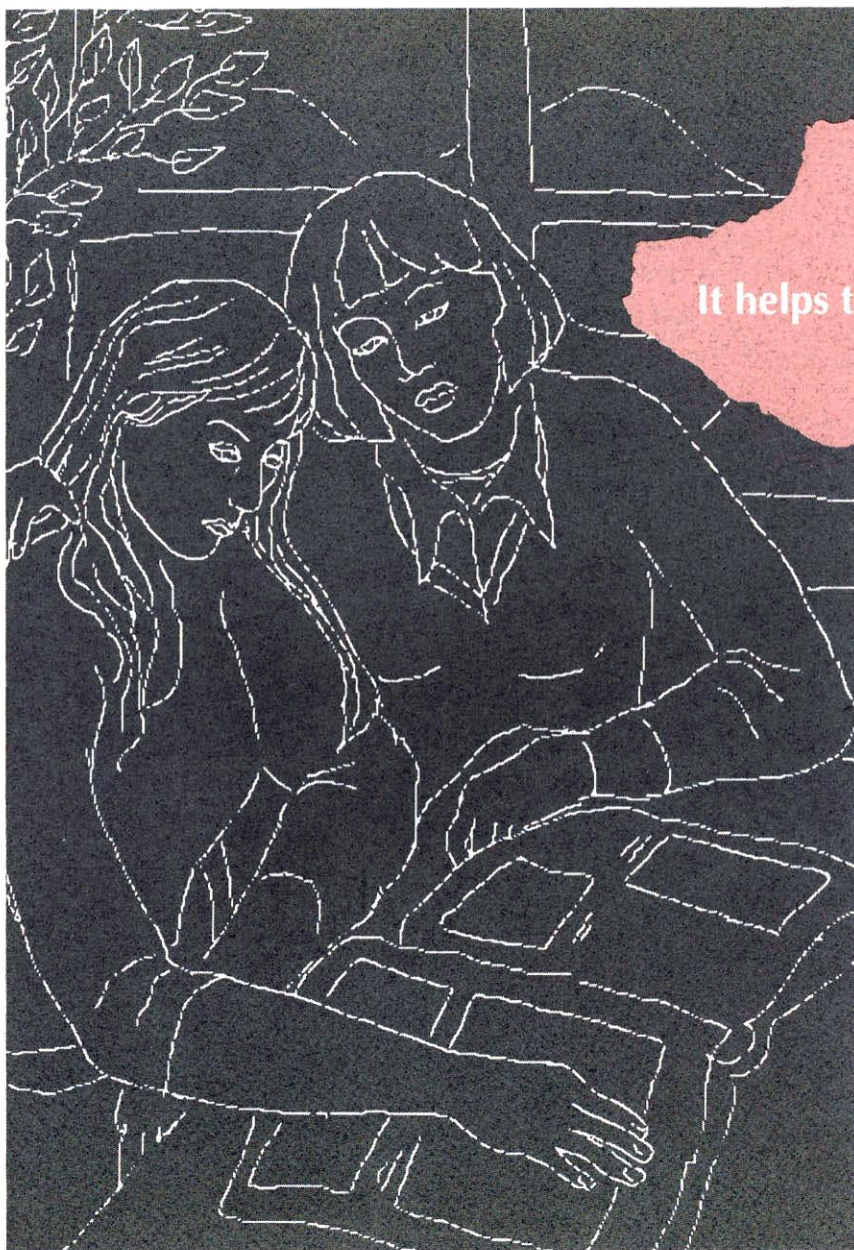
**Alex:** When my baby died, it really helped to just cry. When I felt angry, I'd just yell at the wall or at God. Sometimes I lose my temper over nothing. I tell my friends, just bear with me.

**Maria:** It really helps to find someone to talk to. Someone who just listens and lets me cry. Someone who won't change the subject when I need to talk about what happened. Or when I want to talk about the little things my baby used to do.

**Tracey:** I didn't know if I'd fit in at first, but going to support groups really helped me. And using the booklets and tapes, too. I found out SIDS happens to all kinds of people. SIDS can happen to any family.

**Kim:** Talking with my family really made it better for me. And my public health nurse connected me with another teenage SIDS parent who lives near me. It helps to talk to someone my own age who has been through it.

**Phil:** I hate being alone. It helps me to be with Kim and look at the pictures we have of the baby. Sometimes we visit her grave and talk to her. That helps too.



It helps to talk about it.

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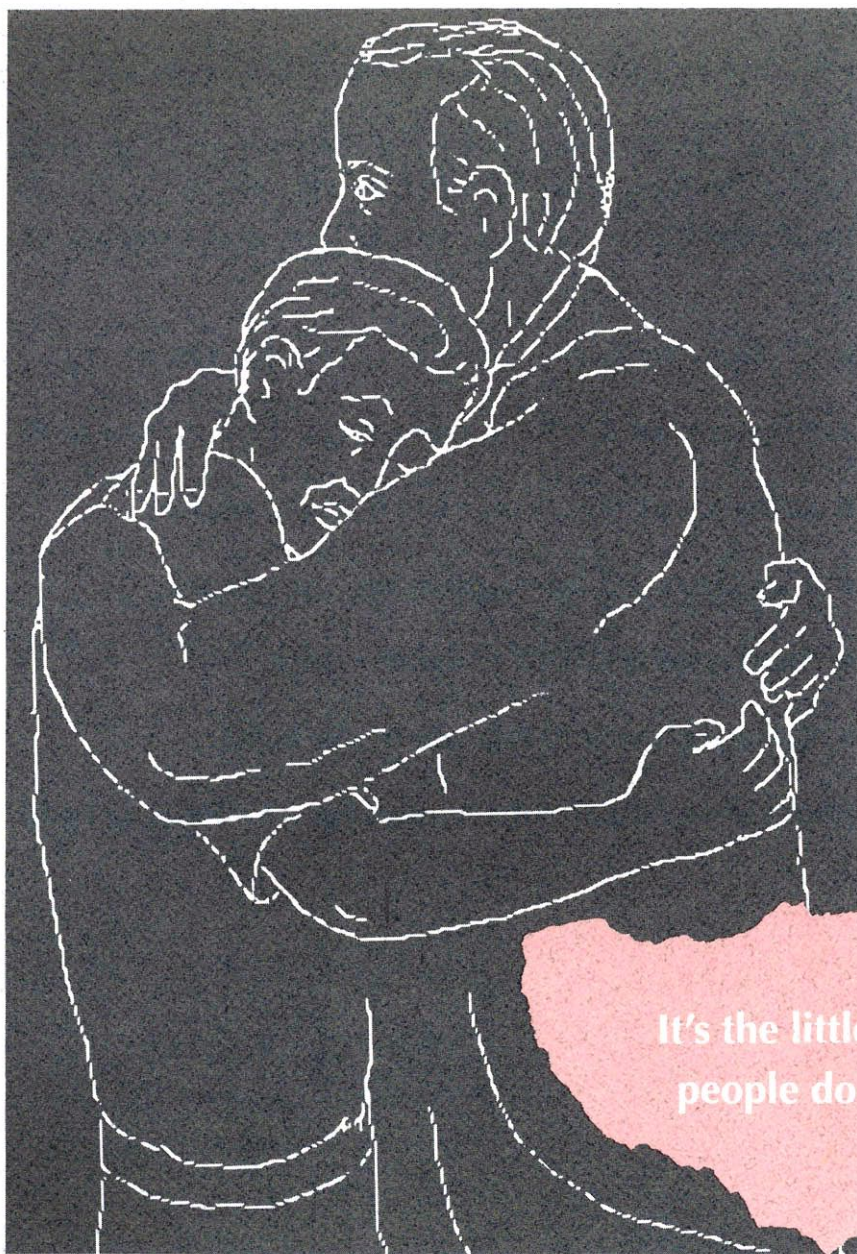
**Phil:** When our baby died, I know our family and friends had a hard time knowing what to do to help. For me, just having someone to listen to me was what I needed the most.

**Kim:** I guess I'd tell people to not be afraid of talking about the baby and making me cry. I think about the baby anyway and sometimes it feels good to cry.

**Tracey:** I ask people if it's OK to talk about the baby with them. Some people really can't handle it.

**Maria:** My aunt read a poem at the funeral. She sent me a copy of it. It helped me a lot. It helped me to cry.

**Alex:** It's the little things that help. Thinking of us on his birthday; inviting us over; saying you're sorry; just asking how I'm doing. Giving me a hug sometimes.



It's the little things  
people do that help.

### **For family and friends - what you can do...**

No one can be protected from the pain and sorrow of losing the baby they loved so much. The best we can do is stand by our loved ones as they go through the grief.

- Be there to listen. Let them know it's OK to cry.
- Learn about SIDS. Remind them it's not their fault.
- Bring by a meal. Offer to clean the house.
- Call them and invite them out sometimes.
- Send a special card or write a note.
- Offer a chance to talk about the baby.

Remember, be patient. It takes time to begin to heal.

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### **When your baby dies, you go through so much.**

You will need time, love and support to get through it. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

- SIDS is no one's fault. Learn more about it.
- Ask someone to be with you and listen to you.
- Call a SIDS support group for help.
- Call the Public Health Nursing Department.

Do what you need to do to get through the grief. And do it in your own time. When you need help, ask someone. You don't have to do it alone.

**Would you like to learn more about SIDS?**

**Want to find a SIDS support group in your area?**

Call the California SIDS Program  
**800-369-SIDS (7437)**—Within California or  
visit the Program's website at **[www.californiasids.com](http://www.californiasids.com)**

**Need another SIDS parent to talk to?**

Call your local SIDS support group.

**Do you have any questions or would you like help?**

Call your local Public Health Nursing Department SIDS Program.

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